

THE LATE EMPEROR OF CHINA.

The following is the most interesting account which has yet been published of the recent illness of the Emperor of China. His death had not occurred when the letter was written from which we are permitted to take the following extract:

The Emperor was taken with the first symptoms of small-pox on Dec. 9; and by one of those curious coincidences which the Chinese are always looking for, and to which they attach so much significance, the attack was thought to be connected with, or referable to, the transit of Venus on that day. The Emperor being a descendant of the sun, nothing could occur to dim the purity of that orb which would not be portentous to its earthly representative. Thus the planet, as it crossed the sun's disk, was likened in size to a pea, which in Chinese is called *tan*, and the pustules of small-pox are likewise called *tan*, the characters which stand for the two words also resembling each other. Hence, to the Chinese mind, a clear connection between the transit and the imperial sickness.

On the twelfth day of the attack, regarded as the turning point of the disease, a great religious ceremony was performed, partly as a propitiation to the goddess of small-pox, partly as a thank-offering to her for the favorable symptoms then apparent. It should be observed that while this fell goddess is greatly dreaded and hated, it is the practice of the Chinese to affect a peculiar regard for her, and to avoid the use of any expressions which might possibly provoke her anger. Thus, when anybody is taken with the disease she personifies, friends do not condole with the patient, which might provoke a fatal result, but congratulate him. This superstition, which has its parallels in the beliefs of more polished nations, and is common to a certain stage in the cult of every people, accounts for the expression used with reference to the Emperor's sickness, that he had "experienced the felicity of the heavenly flowers." When it became apparent that the felicity was not to have an infelicitous termination, the imperial astrologers and physicians having been consulted, a great outlay was made for services at the temples and within the palace. The most notable of these services was performed publicly outside of the Imperial City, within the enclosure of the front gate, where there is a Government temple to the goddess of mercy, and in the presence, it is said, of 40,000 or 50,000 natives, including an unusual turnout of women, who were dressed in gayest attire. The affair consisted of the burning of a great number of effigies, of various kinds, in honor of the goddess who had graciously prospered the remedies used. There were nine effigies of divinities, representing not only the goddess of small-pox, but those of nursing, of parturition, descendants, measles, sore eyes, &c. These figures, with others representing servants, &c., placed in twenty-seven sedan chairs, and accompanied by effigies of horses, attendants, food on tables, &c., were burned with much ceremony. The effigies were all made of sorghum stalks, covered with silk and paper of various colors, exhibiting much ingenuity and having a very showy appearance. Besides the goddesses and their attendants in chairs, there were the mounted attendants, a dozen pairs of banners and State parasols, thirteen pavilions with food and fruits, eighty-four tables bearing clothing, nine large boats (for ferryage over the Chinese Styx, perhaps,) and 300 trays of various articles useful to complete an outfit in the next world. These numerous simulacra, costing, it is said, several hundred thousand taels, were all consigned to the flames, and translated, like Elijah, in a chariot of fire to the region of spirits.

There seems to be no doubt that the expensive offering was efficacious, for the Emperor is reported to be convalescent.